

Mountain Goat

Description:

Also known as "Wisdom of the Mountain", mountain goats live on higher and steeper ground than any other animal. Mountain goats will migrate between lowland winter areas and high-elevation summer ranges. The mountain goat is classified as a goat antelope, and looks much like a goat, but is only distantly related to true goats and sheep.

Old and Wise

A mountain goat's appearance does make it look rather "wise." The coat is mostly white and hangs over its rather square body. A long and thick winter coat looks like a weathered white beard which is shed for a shorter and less-shaggy coat in the summer. Mountain goat's eyes, nose, and hooves are all black. Also, on their narrow head are two slender, black, shiny horns rising in a backward curve to a length of 10-12 inches. Hanging from the chin is a double beard of long hair. Most mountain goats stand from three to four feet tall at the shoulder and range from 48 to 70 inches in length. Males are larger than the females. The young, called "kids", usually weigh in at around 30-40 pounds.

Look Up!

An animal that lives at such high elevations can be tricky to find. Mountain goats inhabit rocky cliffs above the tree line in the western mountains of North America. In the spring, mountain goats can be found in snowfields cooling off. In these areas, look for tracks of the mountain goat which resemble those of bighorn sheep. The toes tend to spread so as to present a somewhat square track. A mountain goat's scat resembles deer and sheep but is actually smaller. Like other mountain dwellers, the mountain goat makes beds on rocky ledges where their molted fur and droppings can be found.

Alpine Food

It doesn't look like there would be too much food up on those rocky ledges, but mountain goats do manage to find food sources. The diet of the mountain goat consists of alpine grasses and flowers, sedges, lichens, and almost any tree or shrub. Mountain goats receive the salt they need by licking from a concentrated pool of minerals usually found on rocks.

Rocks as Protection

The mountain goat uses the rocky, steep terrain it lives on to its advantage. Freezing temperatures, heavy snowfall, and navigating rocky cliffs are sure to drive predators away. Although predators are few, grizzly bears, coyotes, and wolves consume goats that may have died in an accident, or avalanche. The kids are a bit more vulnerable, and are sometimes dive bombed by eagles who knock them off the cliff then prey upon them down below. The fierce winters take a toll; eight out of ten kids die in the cold temperatures of winter.

Why Don't They Fall?

Anyone could make a mistake on such hazardous terrain. However, these massive, strong goats are adapted to be great climbers. Weighing an average of 150-300 pounds, mountain goats have short, powerful legs with large hooves that make this animal sure footed and agile. The hooves have sharp outer rims and cushioned skid-proof pads that grip and provide traction on steep, smooth surfaces. In the winter, thick underfur, hairy overcoat, and many layers of fat protect the mountain goat against severe winds and bitter cold temperatures up to fifty degrees below zero. All their long, woolly fur stops at a line just below the knees where the legs are covered with a much shorter fur to make it easier to move around. Male mountain goats have super-thick skin on their backs that work as a shield to protect against the charging horned head of another male mountain goat. That's some great padding! The female uses its horns to defend her territory against other mountain goats.

Moms Rule!

Moms rule in the world of mountain goats. Adult females with kids are in charge not the big, burly male billy goats. Females can even force large males to leave an area. The mating season occurs between November and early January. Females are pregnant for about six months, and she gives birth to a single kid or twins during the springtime. When babies are born they can walk in the first minutes. The moms, also called "nannies", spend a week with the kid before going back to the herd so they make a bonding trust. The nannies and their kids live in groups during the summer and in their own territories during the winter. Billy goats usually live alone except during mating season.

You Won't Find Them in Florida!

The mountain goat's natural range is in the crags of high, rocky mountainous areas. You won't find them in areas without high mountain terrain. Their range goes from southeastern Alaska, south and east through British Columbia, the Yukon, Alberta, into the Cascade Range of Washington, and throughout the Rocky Mountains states of Idaho and Montana. Idaho has around 3,000 mountain goats. They have also been introduced in portions of Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and South Dakota. British Columbia's population is by far the largest at approximately 100,000.



Mountain Goat
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Footprint

No Map

Distribution Map

1. **Species:** Mountain Goat
2. **Scientific Name:** *Oreamnos americanus*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Weight: 150-300 lbs.
Height: 35-45 inches.
5. **Diet:** Alpine grasses and flowers, sedges, lichens, and almost any tree or shrub.
6. **Young:** 1, sometimes 2; called kids.
7. **Lifespan:** 12 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Artiodactyla
Family: Bovidae
9. **Hunted In Idaho:** Yes
10. **Hunting Link:**